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NIVARANA & JHANA / The Mental Hindrances & Meditative Absorption

In order to practice any of the four cornerstones of awareness training (awareness of the physical body, sensations, the mind, and mental qualities) it is first necessary to abandon, as much as possible, the nivarana (mental hindrances). In sutta after sutta the Buddha advises the aspirant begin by being "ardent, alert, and mindful -- putting aside greed & anxiety (or covetousness & distress/grief) with reference to the world" (MN 118:27). Some commentators consider these two mental qualities of greed & distress, which are to be subdued prior to beginning meditation, to represent the first two hindrances (sensual desire & ill-will) in particular and all the mental hindrances in general. Sensual desire & ill-will are thought of by some commentators as the primary hindrances, since frustrated desire or entrenched ill-will are capable of giving rise to the other hindrances of sloth & unconsciousness, restlessness & anxiety, and skeptical doubt. So, whatever form of meditation one is going to practice, it is necessary, if that meditation is to be effective, to remove the obstacles to meditation.

In commentarial tradition the absence of hindrances in the mind during meditation produces a state called "access concentration", considered a mental state without hindrances but also without the jhana factors. It is thought of as an intermediate state arising after the disappearance of the hindrances and before the arising of the jhana factors. But "access concentration" is never mentioned in any of the suttas, and is therefore rejected by the canonical tradition of Buddhism. According to the canonical tradition the absence of the hindrances during meditation will reveal the mind's natural brilliance and result in the natural arising of the jhana factors without any intermediate state required.

Another commentarial fallacy concerning the hindrances is that only one hindrance can be present in the mind at any given moment. The commentarial tradition holds that only one thing can be present in the mind at a time, but this idea cannot be found in the suttas and personal experience should reveal to anyone that the mind can hold several things in its awareness at the same time. Therefore, it may be the case that more than one hindrance is obstructing one's mind simultaneously. I believe the commentarial tradition is correct in asserting that sensual desire or ill-will can cause the other hindrances, so when examining arisen sloth-torpor, restlessness-anxiety, or skeptical doubt, it is necessary to consider if one of the first two hindrances may be acting as a supporting force.

While on the subject of commentarial fallacies concerning the hindrances let me mention one more which I uncovered. According to many commentators if sati (mindfulness) and samadhi (absorption) are unbalanced hindrances will result. An excess of sati and deficiency of samadhi results in restlessness-anxiety, they claim, and an excess of samadhi and deficiency of sati results in sloth-unconsciousness. In truth however there can never be too much mindfulness, transcendental absorption,

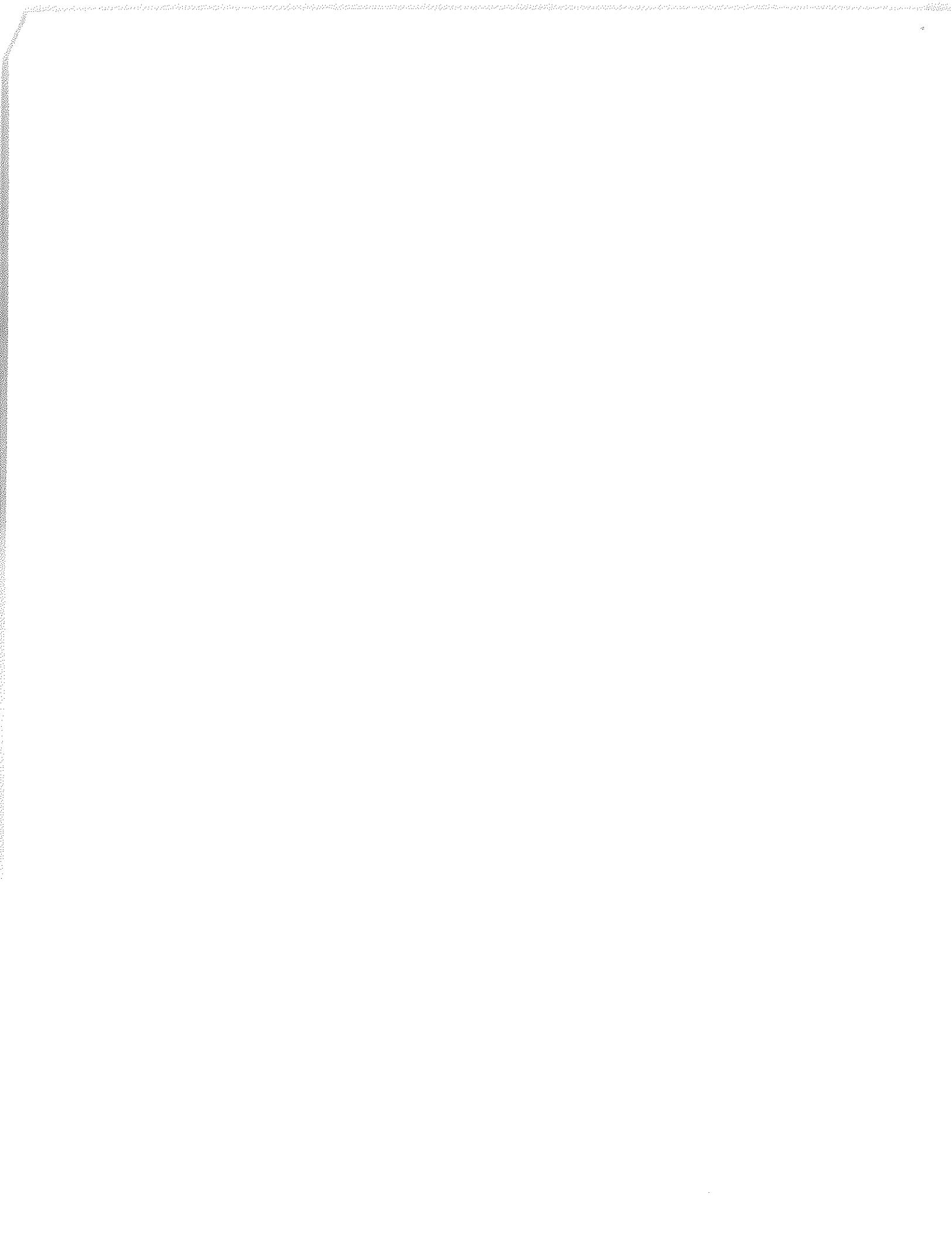
or any other factor of enlightenment. These factors should be brought to full fruition. In Buddhist practice sati and samadhi are not meant to be balanced against each other but, rather, mindfulness is meant to lead to absorption.

The nivarana (hindrances) can be thought of as closed doors in the mind which obstruct the meditative process. While traditional commentaries have correlated each factor of the first jhana (state of meditative absorption) which each of the five hindrances, in reality any hindrance is capable of obstructing any jhana factor. There may be some truth, however, to the idea that certain jhana factors can prove effective antidotes to the future arising of non-arisen hindrances. Traditionally the jhana factor of one-pointedness opposes sensual desire, bliss opposes ill-will, applied attention opposes sloth & unconsciousness, joy opposes restlessness & anxiety, and sustained attention opposes skeptical doubt. In my personal experience I have found a different correlation: bliss opposes sensual desire, joy opposes ill-will, applied attention opposes sloth & unconsciousness, one-pointedness opposes restless & anxiety, and sustained attention opposes skeptical doubt. Mindfulness (a jhana factor not listed in traditional commentaries) opposes all the hindrances. When fostering the jhana factors one should not attempt to grab at or cling to them, but rather invite them in, incline one's mind towards them, and rest in them in a state of surrender.

Let us look more closely at the relationship between the nivarana & the factors of the first jhana. Each jhana factor is to some extent the enemy of all the hindrances, and any hindrance is capable of preventing any jhana factor. Mindfulness and one-pointedness may prove the most effective general antidotes to any and all of the hindrances. But, as I've pointed out above, being more attentive to one-pointedness may be particularly effective in opposing sensual desire and restlessness & anxiety. Applied and sustained attention will also diminish any hindrance because when these qualities of attention are present the mind is then fixed upon the concentration object, and the hindrances are thus prevented any foothold. Sustained attention especially diminishes skeptical doubt since the nature of sustained attention is uninterrupted mental activity without hesitation, the very opposite of "doubting" mind. Concerning bliss and joy, these are the natural enemies of sensual desire. While sensual desire concerns itself with sense objects, bliss and joy are dependent upon renunciation of sense objects. The spiritual object of bliss and joy is the exact opposite of sensuality. Bliss and joy are also opposing forces to ill-will and sloth & unconsciousness. Like darkness & light, the hindrances & jhana factors cannot coexist. For as long as jhana lasts, the hindrances are temporarily eliminated. To permanently uproot the hindrances from the requires the dawning and full development of panna, insight wisdom, which is the natural consequence of continued spiritual practice. It is said that there are three stages of freedom from the hindrances. The first stage is just being temporarily free of the hindrances by chance, the second

stage is being temporarily free of them by abiding in jhana, and the third is being permanently free of them by attaining perfect wisdom (which naturally results through continued spiritual practice). "Samuccheda-vimutti" is the Pali term used to refer to this third stage, the state of liberation experienced by one who has completely and permanently eradicated the hindrances from the mind through realization of perfect wisdom. The permanent eradication of the hindrances then is the permanent extinction of all suffering and the realization of the supreme state of enlightenment.

Achieving temporary freedom from the hindrances though abiding in jhana is therefore the first step to full enlightenment and very foundation of the spiritual path. It is no wonder that in the suttas the Buddha is continually advocating abiding in the jhanic states.



NIVARANA (THE HINDRANCES)

"When the eye is unobstructed the result is seeing. When the ear is unobstructed the result is hearing. When the tongue is unobstructed the result is tasting. When the nose is unobstructed the result is smelling. When the body is unobstructed the result is feeling. When the mind is unobstructed the result is wisdom & compassion." -- a Chinese proverb

In eastern philosophy the mind is considered to be innately luminous and blissful. It is only because of additions to the mind that it becomes darkened and obstructed. The Pali term for hindrance is nivarana. This term implies something that destroys the mind's harmony by covering up its innate positive qualities, preventing knowledge of Dhamma and obstructing the way to Nirvana. The hinderances hinder 3 things: meditative absorption, the wisdom that results from meditative absorption, and the ability to be fully present and fully engaged in whatever activity one is involved in. In order for the mind to attain the states of jhana these hinderances must be temporarily overcome. In order to arrive at full & perfect enlightenment these dinrances must be permanently eradicated. It is in the context of obstructing jhanic absorption that the Buddha most often spoke about the nivarana. The Buddha mentioned five hindrances (pancanivarana): sensual desire, ill-will, sloth & unconsciousness, restlessness & anxiety, & skeptical doubt. The third and fourth hindrance are composed of two elements, so one could understand there to be seven hindrances mentioned by the Buddha. The Buddha also said that each hindrance can be either internal or be external, making the total number of hindrances spoken of by the Buddha either 10. This list comprises the most common hindrances of the mind, but is not an exhaustive list of every possible mental hindrance. While in the canonical Buddhist texts five categories of hinderances are listed, in the post-canonical tradition three more are added. Each of those eight hindrances came to be seen as covering up one of the mind's eight factors of unique excellence.

The five hinderances (pancanivarana):

- 1) kamacchanda -- sensual desire/sensuousness
- 2) vyapada -- ill-will
- 3) thina-middha -- sloth & unconsciousness
- 4) uddhacca-kukkucca --
restlessness/flurry & worry/agitation/remorse/regret
- 5) vicikiccha -- skeptical doubt

Post-canonical hinderances:

- 6) avijja -- ignorance/lack of knowledge
- 7) arati -- aversion
- 8) sabbe akusala dhamma --
the totality of unprofitable mental states

The corresponding factors of unique excellence:

- 1) nekkhamma -- renunciation
- 2) avyapada -- good-will
- 3) aloka-sanna -- perception of light
- 4) avikkhepa -- steadiness
- 5) dhamma-vavatthana -- defining of things
- 6) nana -- joy resulting from knowledge
- 7) pamujja -- happiness
- 8) sabbe kusala dhamma --
the totality of profitable mental states

It is not so important, in my opinion, how many hinderances are formally classified. What is important is recognizing and understanding for oneself all the hindrances which defile one's own mind.

According to Buddhist psychology there are three unwholesome roots for all unwholesome states: lobha (greed), dosa (hatred), and moha (delusion). Dosa is just the flipside of lobha. From these three poisonous mental roots arise 10 fetters which keep a being bound to the cycle of rebirth and locked-out from Nirvana.

The five lower fetters (orambhagiya-samyojana):

- 1) sakya-ditthi (narcissism)
- 2) vicikiccha (skeptical doubt)
- 3) silabbata-paramasa (clinging to rules, rites & rituals)
- 4) kama-raga (desire for sensual pleasure)
- 5) vyapada (ill-will)

The five higher fetters (uddhambhagiya-samyojana):

- 6) rupa-raga (craving for material existence)
- 7) arupa-raga (craving for immaterial existence)
- 8) mana (conceit)
- 9) uddhacca (restlessness)
- 10) avija (ignorance)

From these 10 fetters arise the mental hindrances. If the fetters are thought of as mental winds, then the hindrances can be considered mental tornadoes.

In the Satipathanna Sutta, paragraph 36, four important points are made concerning working with the hinderances:

- 1) Note the presence of a hindrance in the mind.
- 2) Note the absence of a hinderance in the mind.
- 3) Understand how there comes to be the arising of an unarisen hinderance.
- 4) Understand how there comes to be the abandoning of the arisen hinderance.
- 5) Understand how there comes to be the future non-arising of an abandoned hinderance.

A hinderance is like a boat's engine. The engine is in the back propelling the boat forward. Similarly, a hinderance is in the mind of the mind pushing it in some direction or other. A hinderance is also like a black hole. A black hole traps physical light and a mental hinderance traps the light of the

mind's awareness. The hinderances can thus be considered difficult energies which direct in harmful directions or trap in in unwholesome states. While it is common to think of the hinderances as barriers to spiritual practice, in reality the hinderances are not separate from our practice but an integral part of it. They differ from the ordinary parts of our practice in only one significant way. They are especially hard and uncomfortable to deal with. When we bring our mindfulness to the hinderances they become part of the practice itself. We should use every opportunity we have to study the hindrances when they arise so we can know them thoroughly. One will have to work with these hinderances regularly during one's meditation practice because they can only be temporarily overcome by unenlightened minds. Different persons will be prone to difficulty with certain hinderances more than others. The hinderances are uprooted by attaining the stages of sainthood. When one becomes a Stream-winner one permanently destroys skeptical doubt. Upon becoming a Non-returner one permanently destroys sensual desire, ill-will, aversion, and the second component of the fourth hinderance, anxiety. An Arahant destroys the first component of the fourth hinderance, restlessness, as well as ignorance, sloth & unconsciousness, and the totality of unprofitable mental states.

Until attaining arahantship certain methods are effective in dealing with the hinderances, helping to prevent their arising in the mind and aiding in their elimination. Antidotes suitable for specific hinderances are listed on the pages dealing with each individual hinderance. Things that will prove effective in combating all of the hinderances are: dedication to daily spiritual practice; listening to & studying the Dhamma; following the Noble Eightfold Path (which consists of right moral discipline, right thinking & right meditation); keeping noble company & fostering spiritual friendships; engaging in wholesome conversations; avoiding unwholesome persons, places, activities & conversations; practicing the four applications of mindfulness (mindfulness of body, feelings, mental states & dhammas); abiding in meditative absorption (the jhanas), applying the five spiritual faculties; & cultivating the seven factors of enlightenment. The components of the Noble Eightfold Path most relevant to combating the hinderances are, I believe, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness & Right Absorption. The practice of Right Effort applies directly to combating hinderances and involves eliminating arisen unwholesome states, preventing unarisen unwholesome state, fostering unarisen wholesome states & nurturing arisen wholesome states. Applying right mindfulness working with the hinderances is perhaps the most effective method of combating them. And right mindfulness will lead to right absorption which will lead to full & perfect enlightenment.

The hinderances are considered to be medium level defilements (kilesa) which pollute the mind. The coarse level defilements manifest by defiling our speech & bodily actions. The subtle level defilements (ayakilesa) lie dormant in the five skandhas until there is sufficient cause for them to arise

as either coarse or medium defilements, normally as a result of sensory stimuli.

In the Satipathhana Sutta the hindrances are classified as dhammas to be contemplated. They are the first dhammas noted in the Satipatthana Sutta, followed by the five aggregates, the sensory bases, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the Four Noble Truths. So, after one has overcome the hindrances one can go on to contemplate these other dhammas in depth, with a calm and unified mind. The Buddha called the seven factors of enlightenment non-hindrances, and cultivating them is a very effective method of helping to overcome the hindrances. Using the five spiritual faculties are also effective in opposing the hindrances. The jhana factors also work to counter the hindrances. And in Buddhist tradition each of the five jhana factors have come to be associated with a specific hindrance, as we shall see later. When the hindrances are present in the mind, the jhana factors cannot appear. When the jhana factors are present, the hindrances are absent, being temporarily suppressed. In Buddhist commentarial tradition, when the hindrances are absent during meditation the mind is considered to be in a state of access concentration (a prejhanic state). But in the canonical tradition, when the hindrances are absent during meditation, the jhana factors will naturally arise and one will then abide in the first jhana stage or higher.

Advancing Levels of Response to a Hindrance

Return to the primary meditation object with renewed vigor & mindfulness.

Remember the 5 "R"s:

- 1) Register the thought/feeling/experience (note it & name it).
- 2) Resist no thought/feeling/experience.
- 3) Retain no thought/feeling/experience.
- 4) React to no thought/feeling/experience.
- 5) Return to the meditation object.

Divert the mind to something else that that is wholesome, then return to the meditation object. (MN 20:3)

Feel the hindrance in the body. Then, return to the primary meditation object.

Use an antidote suitable for the specific hindrance, then return to the primary meditation object. Antidote methods:

- 1) Direct one's attention to a wholesome state that opposes the specific hindrance being experienced or to someone who embodies this wholesome state.
- 2) Use a mantra and/or mudra that expresses a wholesome state which opposes the specific hindrance.
- 3) Reflect upon the wholesome state in meditation.
- 4) Embody the wholesome state. Tune in & turn on to the wholesome state and you will drop out of the unwholesome state.

Take an analytical, thinking approach with the hindrance. Talk to oneself about what's going on. See the harm and danger in the hindrance. Reflect on it's conditionality & impermanence. Understand that it is not-self. Then return to the primary meditation object. (MN 20:4)

Ignore the hindrance and try to forget it. (MN 20:5)

Give attention to stilling the thought-formations of the hindering thoughts. (MN 20:6)

Change your state of mind by changing your situation. Take a break and do something different which is wholesome. Then return to meditation object.

Clench your teeth & place your tongue firmly against the palette, and like a big strong man beats down a little weak man, use your well-intentioned mind to vigorously suppress the unwholesome state. After using the mind to constrain the mind, relax and return with to the primary meditation object.

The Spiritual Faculties, Enlightenment Factors & Jhana Factors
Which Counter Specific Hindrances

The Five Spiritual Faculties (indriya):

- 1) saddhindriya (faith/conviction) -- ill-will
- 2) viriyindriya (energy faculty) -- sloth & unconsciousness
- 3) satindriya (mindfulness faculty) -- sensual desire
- 4) samadhindriya (absorption faculty) -- restlessness & anxiety
- 5) pannindriya (wisdom faculty) -- skeptical doubt

Seven Factors of Enlightenment (bojjhanga):

- 1) dhamma-vicara-sambojjhanga (investigation of the way) -- sloth & unconsciousness, skeptical doubt
- 2) viriya-sambojjhanga (energy) -- sloth & unconsciousness
- 3) passaddhi-sambojjhanga (tranquility) -- restlessness & anxiety
- 4) sati-sambojjhanga (mindfulness) -- sensual desire
- 5) upakkha-sambojjhanga (equanimity) -- ill-will, restlessness & anxiety
- 6) piiti-sambojjhanga (bliss) -- ill-will, sloth & unconsciousness
- 7) samadhi-sambojjhanga (absorption) -- restlessness & anxiety

The Factors of the First Jhana (jhananga):

- 1) sati (mindfulness) -- sensual desire, ill-will, sloth & unconsciousness, restlessness & anxiety, skeptical doubt
- 2) vitakka (applied attention) -- sloth & unconsciousness
- 3) vicara (sustained attention) -- skeptical doubt
- 4) piiti (bliss) -- ill-will
- 5) sukha (joy) -- restlessness & anxiety
- 6) ekaggatha (one-pointedness) -- sensual desire

SENSUAL DESIRE/KAMACCHANDHA

Definition: "Kamacchandha" means "lustful or sensual desire". This hindrance of sensuousness is satisfaction with, delight or absorption in, craving for and/or attachment to the objects experienced through any of the six sense gates (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind). Sometimes, when referred to as a fetter for example, it is called "kama-raga" (addiction to sensual desire or lust). It is a form of "lobha" (greed), one of the three unwholesome roots.

Covered-up Factor of Unique Excellence: nekkhamma (renunciation)

Energetic Mode: Sensual desire is an initiating energetic state of wanting that inclines the mind outward, away from the present moment which is judged to be incomplete and therefore unsatisfactory. This wanting energy in the mind drives a person to seek out pleasant experiences, cling to them, and guard against losing them. Delighting in sensuousness can cause a burning agitation that tortures and darkens the mind. In many cases the individual actually enjoys having these thoughts of sensuousness, failing to see their dangerous conditioning effect on the mind, and engages in prolonged daydreaming about satisfying this sensual craving. This type of mental defilement is called "ragaggi" (the fire of passion).

Water Simile: Sensual desire in the mind is like beautiful colored dye mixed into clear water. (SN 46:55)

Liberation Simile: Being freed from sensual desire is like being freed from debt.
(MN 39:14)

Nourishment: Subhanimitta (delighting in the beauty/fixing a meaning of something as beautiful); "Subha" means "beauty" and "nimitta" means "sign". Frequent unwise attention to a sensually attractive object, specifically careless attention to an object's attractive appearance (in its details or its whole), causes sensual desire to arise and remain in the mind. (SN 46:51) Even imagining or thinking about a beautiful object will nourish kamacchandha.

Denourishment: Asubhanimitta (recollection on repulsiveness). Frequent wise attention to an impure meditation object, specifically careful attention to it's foul appearance, will help remove arisen sensual desire from the mind and prevent its return. (SN 46:51)

Commentarial Suggestions:

- * learn to meditate on impure objects
- * devote oneself to the meditation on the impure
- * guard the sense-doors
- * practice moderation in eating
- * foster noble friendships
- * engage in suitable conversation

Specific Aids:

- * meditation upon the parts of the body
- * charnel ground contemplations
- * reflection upon impermanence and death
- * moderation and restraint in regards to the desired object (quit thinking about subhaniitta)
- * avoid garlic
- * balance sexual chakra

Opposing Jhana Factor: ekagatta (one-pointedness) [or piiti (bliss)]

Helpful Spiritual Faculty: Sati (mindfulness)

Factor of Enlightenment to be Nourished: Sati (mindfulness).

Four things lead to the arising of sati: being inclined to mindfulness; practicing mindfulness with clear comprehension; avoiding unmindful persons with confused minds; association with mindful persons.

Stage of Eradication: Anagami (Non-returner)

Helpful Thoughts: You are what you seek, so don't look outside of yourself.

"The real voyage of discovery comes not from seeing new landscapes, but from having new eyes." (Proust)

"Without desire everything is sufficient. With seeking, myriad things are impoverished." (Ryokan)

ILL-WILL/VYAPADA

Definition: "Vyapada" means "ill-will". The hindrance of ill-will is an aversion to or rejection of some person, place, thing or experience. It is a disagreeable and harmful state which defiles the mind with feelings of hostility and irritation. It is a form of "dosa" (hatred), one of the three unwholesome roots.

Covered-up Factor of Unique Excellence: Avyapada (good-will)

Energetic Mode: Ill-will is an initiating energy of aversion in the mind that seeks to push away that which is experienced as unpleasant. Ill-will isolates a person from reality, separating one from the present moment which is judged to be unbearable. It says "I don't want" and can thus be considered the flipside of sensual desire, which says "I want". There are many flavors of ill-will, such as anger, resentment, hatred, judgementalism, fear, irritability, etc., all of which are a rejection of reality. The mind hindered by ill-will can be considered wounded because any unpleasant friction will cause hostile feelings and mental suffering to arise. First aversion arises through contact with something unpleasant (it could be physical contact with something unpleasant person, object or environment or even contact with one's own unpleasant thoughts). Then negative reactions to the aversion may arise and escalate the level of suffering. According to Buddhist psychology, ill-will first appears as "patigha" (irritation/discontent with something) and may then grow to become "kodha" (wrathful passion). Kodha can then progress into "dosa" (anger). Those under the influence of dosakkhi (the fire of anger) may seek to harm themselves or others, or lash out on inanimate objects. Unrestrained dosa becomes full-blown vyapada (ill-will). Finally, excessive ill-will escalates into the mental state of retribution. Ill-will differs from retribution in that it is possible for ill-will to subside in the mind after vengeance has been acted out, whereas the powerful driving force of retribution traps one in an endless cycle of vengeance.

Water Simile: Ill-will in the mind is like boiling water. (SN 46:51)

Liberation Simile: Being liberated from ill-will is like overcoming a severe illness. (MN 39:14)

Nourishment: Patighanimitta (irritation or friction which has an emotional impact on the mind) causes vyapada. Frequent unwise attention to a repulsive object causes ill-will to arise and remain in the mind. (SN 46:51)

Denourishment: Frequent careful attention to loving-kindness prevents unarisen ill-will from arising and removes arisen states of ill-will. (SN 46:51) Metta-cetovimutti (loving-kindness)

Commentarial Suggestions:

- * learn metta-bhavana (loving-kindness meditation)
- * devote oneself to metta-bhavana
- * consider kamma (you're the owner & heir of you're actions)
- * frequently reflect on kamma
- * cultivate noble friendships
- * engage in suitable conversation

Specific Aids:

- *meditation on the four elements
(see how these elements comprise the aversive object & oneself)
- * guard the sense-gates
- * note how anger often arises from your own thought about or mental reaction to something rather than from contact with the thing itself
- * moderation in food and drink
- * avoid onions, especially raw onions
- * balance the solar and heart chakras

Opposing Jhana Factor: piiti (bliss) [or sukha (joy)]

Helpful Spiritual Faculty: Saddha (faith)

Factors of Enlightenment to be Nourished: Piiti (bliss) & Upekkha (equanimity).

Piiti is nourished by: recollection of the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, virtue, liberality, the devas, & upasama (subsidence); avoiding coarse persons; association with refined persons; & inclination towards piiti.

Upekkha is nourished by: having a detached attitude toward beings, & things; avoiding persons who are egotistical toward beings and things; & inclination towards upekkha.

Stage of Eradication: Anagami (Non-returner)

Helpful Thoughts: Settle your heart and mind right in the middle of any aversion and ill-will. Remember, to attain enlightenment the Buddha had to sit through all of Mara's unpleasant attacks.

"Be compassionate toward the anger, it is suffering." (Thich Nhat Hanh)

Reflect on kamma like this... "Being angry with another person, what can you do to him? Can you destroy his virtue and his other good qualities? Have you not come to your present state by your own actions, and will also go hence according to your own actions? Anger towards another is just as if someone wishing to hit another person takes hold of glowing coals, or a heated iron-rod, or of excrement. And, in the same way, if the other person is angry with you, what can he do to you? Can he destroy your virtue and your other good qualities? He too has come to his present state by his own actions and will go hence according to his own actions. Like an unaccepted gift or like a handful of dirt thrown against the wind, his anger will fall back on his own head." (Commentary to the Satipatthana Sutta -- Nyanaponika Thera)

SLOTH & UNCONSCIOUSNESS/THINA-MIDDHA

Definition: "Thina-middha" is a hindrance composed of two complementary mental factors. "Thina" means "sloth" and "middha" means "torpor, drowsiness or unconsciousness". Thina is a disinclination to action. Middha is a state of inactivity or non-wakefulness, such as unconsciousness during the sleep cycle. While both of these forces can be either internal or external, as all hindrances, thina is more physical and middha more mental in nature. This hindrance is a form of "moha" (delusion), one of the three unwholesome roots.

Covered-up Factor of Unique Excellence: Aloka-sanna or (perception of light)

Energetic Mode: The hindrance of sloth & unconsciousness is a receptive energetic state which is caused by some sort of energy block or drain. This lack of energy causes one to retreat in the face of difficulties. It can manifest in many ways, such as sluggishness, dullness, drowsiness, apathy, boredom, etc. This hindrance is not tiredness. Even enlightened beings can become tired, but tiredness is no hindrance for them and they can maintain their mindfulness despite tiredness. The mind with this hindrance is stiff, rigid, unwieldy and dark, lacking its natural brightness. Giving in to sloth & unconsciousness can be easily but falsely interpreted as having compassion for oneself (believing for example, "I should sleep instead of meditate." or "I should relax rather than study.") This mental hindrance is like cold butter, being a cold, congealed and heavy condition. It is also like a parasitic mold whose growth weakens and eventually destroys a plant because sloth & unconsciousness weaken and dull the mind so much that one in their grip makes no effort at skillful action or cultivation of sati and samadhi.

Water Simile: One hindered by sloth & torpor is like clear water covered with algae and water plants. (SN 46:55)

Liberation Simile: Being freed from sloth & unconsciousness is like being freed from a prison. (MN 39:14)

Nourishment: Frequent unwise attention to states of discontent, boredom or lethargy causes sloth & torpor to arise and grow in the mind. (SN 46:51) According to the Pancakanipata of Anguttaranikaya, careless attention to five specific mental states nourish sloth & torpor.

- * Arati (not being pleased)
- * Tandi (laziness)
- * Vijambhika (weariness)
- * Bhattasammada (intoxication from food)
- * Cetaso linattam (downheartedness)

Denourishment: Viriya (energy/perseverance). To prevent and eliminate sloth & torpor give frequent wise attention to the three elements of energy 1) arousing of right effort 2) persistence/exertion of right effort 3) vigorousness of right effort (SN 46:51) *MN 119 p.11*

Commentarial Suggestions:

- * moderation in eating
- * change the body posture (for example, sit up straighter, open the eyes, stand up, walk at a moderate or fast pace, do yoga asanas), *lay down & rest*
- * perception of light meditation (stare into bright light or imagine bright light flooding the mind)
- * stay in the open air
- * cultivate noble friendships
- * engage in suitable converstaion

Specific Aids:

- * contemplate the preciousness of rare human birth
- * recollection of death
- * perceive the suffering of impermanence
- * cultivate sympathetic joy
- * pinch or pull the ear lobes
- * pranayama breathing exercises (such as fire breathing, full yogic breathing, etc.)
- * ask yourself "What would I be experienceing now if this hinderance were not present?" (Sloth & torpr can be an unconscious reation to something you don't want to be experiencing.)
- * be more precise in what you are paying attention to
- * meditate at least 20-30 minutes after a meal
- * meditate after taking a nap and when fully refreshed
- * recall the dedication, zeal, effort and spiritual journey of the Buddhas and Arahants
- * contemplate the greatness of the Buddha & his heritage
- * reflect on the 8 stirring objects: birth, decay, disease, death, the suffering in the worlds of misery, the suffering of the past rooted in the round of existence, the suffering of the future rooted in the round of existence, the suffering of the present rooted in the round of existence
- * perceive the 5 threatening dangers to one's spiritual practice: old age, sickness, famine, civil unrest, schism in the Sangha (AN 5:78)
- * 8 progresive steps to overcome mental torpor: 1) give it no attention; 2) reflect on the Dhamma; 3) memorize the Dhamma; 4) shake your ears and rub your limbs with your palms; 5) get up, wash your eyes with water, look around in all directions and up at the sky; 6) fully establish the inner perception of light; 7) walk up & down, conscious of what is before & behind you, with senses turned inwards; 8) lie down on your right side & assume the lion's posture, stay mindful, keep in mind the thought of rising, sleep with clear consciousness, then, upon waking, rise quickly and don't indulge in reclining or sleeping again until necessary (AN 7:58)

RESTLESSNESS & ANXIETY/UDDHACCA-KUKKUCCA

Definition: The hindrance of uddhacca-kukkucca is comprised of two unwholesome mental factors. "Uddhacca" means "restlessness or flurry" and "kukkucca" means "scruples, worry, anxiety, remorse, or regret". These states of mind have in common the presence of a disturbing quality of unease. This hindrance of flurry & worry is a form of "moha" (delusion).

Covered-up Factor of Unique Excellence: Avikkhepa (steadiness)

Energetic Mode: The hindrance of restlessness & anxiety is a responsive energetic state of excessive energy. The result is a trembling, flickering, uneasy mind that lacks balance and serenity. Persons under the sway of this hindrance are easily annoyed. Uddhacca is more of a physical uneasiness while kukkucca is more of a mental unease, although both factors can have either an internal or external focus. When a beehive is struck by a stick, the bees swarm about outside the hive in an agitated state. Likewise, a mind struck with restlessness or anxiety will hover around its meditation object in an agitated state, never fully resting in it. This hindrance tends to be more of a problem for thinking, analytical types of individuals. Thinking doesn't lead to meditative absorption. Thinking leads to restlessness & agitation, which leads to more thinking, leading to more restlessness & anxiety. It is a vicious cycle. Restlessness & anxiety can occur simultaneously or separately. Like viruses which weaken people's physical health, restlessness & anxiety are among the most widespread and effective destroyers of persons' mental health.

Water Simile: A mind troubled by restlessness & remorse is like clear water full of waves, agitated by the blowing wind.
(SN 46:55)

Liberation Simile: Being freed from flurry & worry is like being liberated from slavery. (MN 39:14)

Nourishment: Cetaso avupasama (a restless mind). Frequent unwise attention to unrest in the mind will nourish restlessness & anxiety. (SN 46:51)

Denourishment: Cetaso Vupasama (peace of mind). Frequent wise attention to quietude of mind will denourish restlessness & anxiety. (SN 46:51)

Commentarial Suggestions:

- * knowledge of Buddhist Scriptures
- * asking questions about the Buddhist Scriptures
- * familiarity with the Vinaya (Code of Monastic Discipline)
- * association with those mature in age and experience who possess dignity, restraint & calm
- * fostering noble friendships
- * engaging in suitable conversation

Specific Aids:

- * practice sila or moral discipline (right action, right speech, right livelihood, etc.)
- * pranayama breathing exercises to calm the body & mind
- * reassure yourself; let "It's OK" be your mantra
- * be aware of the spaciousness of sound
- * surrender to the hindrance (resistance keeps it strong)
- * visualize a calming scene
- * select a peaceful object of meditation, such as mindfulness of breathing, the qualities of the Buddha, infinite space kasina, a blue kasina, etc.
- * balance the root chakra & heart chakra
- *

Opposing Jhana Factor: Sukkha (joy) [Ekagatta (onepointedness)]

Helpful Spiritual Faculty: Samadhi (absorption)

Factors of Enlightenment to Cultivate: Passaddhi (tranquility), Samadhi (absorption), Upekkha (equanimity). (SN 46:53)

To cultivate passaddhi: eat fine food; abide in comfortable weather; assume comfortable postures; use judgment according to the Middle Way; avoid restless persons; associate with calm persons; be inclined to develop passaddhi.

To cultivate samadhi: purify the basics (cleanse body, clothes, lodging, etc.); balance the spiritual faculties; be skillful in taking up the nimitta of the object of meditation; occasionally incite, gladden, & regard the mind; avoid persons uncollected in the mind; associate with persons collected in the mind; reflect on the absorptions & emancipations of the mind; be inclined towards developing samadhi.

To cultivate upekkha: be detached towards beings & things; avoid persons egotistical in relation to beings & things; be inclined to develop upekkha.

Factors of Enlightenment Not To Be Cultivated While Under the Influence of This Hindrance: Dhamma-vicaya (investigation of phenomenon), Viriya (energy), Upekkha (equanimity). (SN 46:53)

Stage of Eradication for Uddhacca: Arahant (Worthy One)

Stage of Eradication for Kukkucca: Anagami (Non-returner)

Helpful Thoughts: "Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart. Do not now seek answers that cannot be given, but take whatever comes with great respect." (Rilke)

"A whirlwind may be blowing through space, but if we become the space, we can hold it." (Joseph Goldstein)

"There are two things, bhikkhus, causing remorse. . . Here someone has not done what is good, . . . wholesome, . . . beneficial, but has done evil, callous, wrongful deeds. . . There are two things, bhikkhus, causing no remorse. . . Here someone has done what is good, . . . wholesome, . . . beneficial, and has not done evil, callous, wrongful deeds." (Itivuttaka 30 & 31)

AUM SHANTI, SHANTI AUM

SKEPTICAL DOUBT/VICIKICCHA

Definition: Vicikiccha is the hinderance of skeptical doubt and refers to skepticism, uncertainty, or lack of confidence in the one's spiritual practice methods. It could involve doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma or Sangha, the Buddha's enlightenment, or the way of practice taught by the Buddha. It entails confusion about what is good, wholesome, beneficial and skillful and what is not. It is an obstacle to spiritual progress because it results in a wavering in or stagnation in one's spiritual practice. This negative form of doubt to be avoided is known as small doubt, and is contrasted in Buddhism with a positive form of doubt that is encouraged, referred to as great doubt. Great doubt involves the desire for clarification about Dhamma and to clearly comprehend the big questions of life. Vicikiccha is a form of "moha" (delusion).

Corresponding Factor of Unique Excellence: Dhamma-vavatthana (defining of things)

Water Simile: A mind with doubt is like clear water obscured by darkness or like cloudy, muddy water. (SN 46:55)

Liberation Simile: Being liberated from skeptical doubt is like safely ending a dangerous journey through a desert or wilderness. (MN 39:14)

Energetic Mode: Skeptical doubt is considered the the mother of all hinderances and the most dangerous because it cuts off one's practice before it can start. It can be thought of as an environment of confusion, or it can be considered a fragmentation of one's energies. Doubt and skepticism work to separate one from the present moment so it can be scrutinized from the outside looking in. It is the trickiest of the hinderances to deal with because it is so easy for the mind to buy into its storyline and to believe one's doubt is valid, logical and rational.

Nourishment: Ayonisomanasikara (unwise thinking). Careless, unwise attention to things that are the basis of doubt serves to foster doubt.

Denourishment: Yonisomanasikara (analytical consideration). Careful reflection with panna (wisdom) upon things karmically wholesome & not, things to be practiced & not, things of high & low value, & things bright & dark, etc. casts out arisen doubt and prevents doubt's future arising.

Traditional Suggestions:

- * study the Buddhist Scriptures
- * question the wise about the Scriptures
- * become familiar with the Vinaya (moral code)
- * establish firm conviction concerning the Triple Gem
- * foster noble friendships
- * engage in suitable conversations

Specific Aids: To combat doubt, practice

- * methods of instilling faith -- for example, by reciting the refuges, precepts, qualities of the Buddha, etc.
- * listening to dhamma talks
- * reflecting on how you (and not someone else) have come to be here now practicing Dhamma through the accumulation of good merit
- * building self-confidence by self-witnessing the practice method (spiritual practice cannot be judged from outside looking in but must be internally self-witnessed)
- * personal reflection upon & deep investigation of the Noble Eightfold Path, the Four Noble Truths, the jhananga (factors of absorption), bojjhanga (factors of enlightenment), indriya (spiritual faculties), skhandas (five aggregates), anicca, dukkha & anatta (three marks of existence), Dependent Co-origination, and other aspects of the Dhamma.

Corresponding Jhana Factor: Vicara (sustained attention/experience of the meditation object)

Helpful Spiritual Faculty: Panna (wisdom)

Enlightenment Factor to Cultivate: Dhamma-vicaya (investigation of reality). To cultivate Dhamma-vicaya: inquire about the dhammas and reflect on the difference of their processes; purify the basics; balance the indriya; avoid the ignorant; associate with the wise; be inclined to develop dhammavicaya.

Helpful Thoughts: We know -- know emptiness. We realize -- realize emptiness. We see clearly -- see emptiness clearly. We abide with -- abide with emptiness. We are empty -- empty with emptiness.

"To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a form of transportation." (from The Life of Pi)

Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi, Swaha!

The Fetters & Hindrances Effected at Each Stage of Sainthood:

Sotapanna / Stream-Winner

Fetters Destroyed: sakkaya-ditthi (self-view/narcissism); vicikiccha (skeptical doubt); silabbata-paramasa (clinging to rules, rites & rituals)

Hindrance Eradicated: vicikkicha (skeptical doubt)

Sakadagami / Once-Returner

Fetters Weakened: kama-raga (sensual lust); vyapada (illwill)

Hindrances Weakened: kamacchandra (sensual desire); vyapada (ill-will)

Anagami / Non-Returner

Fetters Destroyed: kama-raga (sensual lust); vyapada (ill-will)

Hindrances Eradicated: kamacchandra (sensual desire); vyapada (ill-will); kukucca (anxiety); arati (aversion)

Arahant / Worthy-One

Fetters Destroyed: rupa-raga (craving for material existence); arupa-raga (craving for immaterial existence); mana (conceit); uddhacca (restlessness); avijja (ignorance)

Hindrances Eradicated: uddhacca (restlessness); thina-middha (sloth & unconsciousness); avijja (ignorance); sabbe akusala dhamma (the totality of unprofitable mental states)

